

“Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country” Government Schools Joint School Gala showcases fruitful achievements (with photos)

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (June 30) held the "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" Celebration of 26th Anniversary of Hong Kong's Return to the Motherland cum Government Schools Joint School Activities Gala to showcase the fruitful achievements of the "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" joint school national education activities in this school year.

The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, together with the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, officiated at the event. About 500 EDB representatives, government school principals and vice-principals, as well as representatives of secondary and primary school councils, school head associations, school sponsoring bodies and the Committee on Home-School Co-operation attended.

Speaking at the Gala, Mr Cheuk said that strengthening national education on all fronts is a major initiative of the Government. The first-year "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" activities have set a very good example. He thanked all principals and teachers of government schools for their effort and contribution to national education and was pleased with students' enthusiastic participation in the activities. He also encouraged students to continue learning within and beyond the classroom, and care and learn about the country and Hong Kong's developments and culture.

Addressing the event, Dr Choi said that the EDB has all along been adopting a multipronged and co-ordinated approach to promote national education and led 65 government schools to launch a series of joint school national education activities under the theme of "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" in this school year. Over 12 000 teachers and students from government and non-government schools participated in the activities with excellent achievements.

The "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" joint school national education activities included exhibitions, fun days, competitions, performances and community exploration activities, with an aim of deepening students' understanding of Chinese culture, and national development and achievements, as well as cultivating in them a sense of nationhood, national identity and affection for the nation. To foster exchanges in the school sector, some of the activities were open for participation by students and teachers from non-government schools.

The Gala today was the grand finale of the "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" series. Hundreds of students from government schools participated in

the performance, including the Flag Raising Ceremony and Chinese-style foot drill by joint school flag-guards, as well as folk music, dance and martial arts performance, to showcase their learning achievements. The event also included student sharing sessions and showed a video of highlights of the joint school activities in this school year.

The EDB will continue to promote the "Love Our Home, Treasure Our Country" joint school national education activities in the 2023/24 school year and organise more diversified learning activities to promote national education to nurture young people into quality citizens with a sense of social responsibility and national identity, as well as an affection for Hong Kong.



Government welcomes passage of Road Tunnels (Government) (Amendment) Bill 2023

The Government welcomed the passage of the Road Tunnels (Government) (Amendment) Bill 2023 by the Legislative Council today (June 28), which enables a major step forward in rationalising cross-harbour traffic.

The Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, said, "The Government's proposed toll plans for the three road-harbour crossings (RHCs) are scientifically based, well deliberated and balanced, and have positively responded to the views of Members of the Legislative Council, the transport trades and the public, after numerous rounds of studies and discussions. The toll plans will help alleviate cross-harbour traffic congestion, and bring benefits to private car motorists, the public transport trades, the commercial vehicle trades, cross-harbour bus passengers and the community as a whole."

The Bill provides for matters relating to the Government's takeover arrangements of the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC) on August 2 this year; and the all-day fixed toll plan for private cars at the three RHCs in the first phase, i.e. the toll for private cars using the WHC will be reduced by 20 per cent to \$60, while the toll for private cars using the Cross-Harbour Tunnel and the Eastern Harbour Crossing will be adjusted to \$30. Taxi toll for the three tunnels will be charged at a flat rate of \$25 all day. The relevant provisions will come into force on August 2 this year.

The Bill also provides for a time-varying toll plan. The Government plans to implement time-varying toll at the three RHCs later this year, i.e. the toll for private cars is between \$20 and \$60; toll for motorcycles (including motor tricycles) is between \$8 and \$24; cross-harbour taxi toll remains an all-day fixed toll of \$25; other commercial vehicles including goods vehicles and buses are charged an all-day fixed toll of \$50. The relevant provisions will come into force on a day to be separately appointed by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics.

Government appoints HKEX Risk Management Committee members

The Financial Secretary has reappointed Ms Miranda Kwok Pui-fong and Mr Sun Yu as members of the Risk Management Committee (RMC) of the Hong Kong

Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX).

The reappointments, made under section 65 of the Securities and Futures Ordinance, will take effect from July 1, 2023, for a term of two years.

"Ms Kwok and Mr Sun are experienced professionals in the financial services sector. We believe that they will continue to provide invaluable advice to the RMC and contribute to formulating appropriate risk management policies for the HKEX," a Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau spokesman said today (June 23).

The RMC was established in March 2000 with the role of formulating policies on risk management matters relating to the activities of the HKEX and its subsidiaries for submission to the Board of the HKEX for consideration.

The RMC is chaired by the Chairman of the HKEX, Mrs Laura Cha May-lung. Other serving members are Mrs Susan Chow Woo Mo-fong, Mr Hugo Leung Pak-hon, the Executive Director (Supervision of Markets) of the Securities and Futures Commission, the Executive Director (Monetary Management) of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and the Chairman of the Hong Kong Interbank Clearing Limited.

[LCQ20: Supporting single-parent families](#)

Following is a question by Reverend Canon the Hon Peter Douglas Koon and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

It is learnt that the divorce rate in Hong Kong has been on the rise in recent years, and the number of single-parent families has also increased drastically, with more and more difficulties being faced by them. On the other hand, since the Government's cessation in 2004 of subvention for the five single parent centres (SPCs) operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the services needed by single-parent families have been provided by the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres (SCSCs) under the Social Welfare Department. However, some concern groups on single-parent families have relayed to me that the services provided by IFSCs and SCSCs lack focus and continuity, and do not meet the needs of single-parent families. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of single-parent families throughout the territory and the number of children they had, in each of the past five years;

(2) of the following information on each of the IFSCs and SCSCs in each of the past five years: (i) the number of requests for assistance from single parents handled (with a breakdown by new and old case), (ii) the average time taken for handling such requests, (iii) the staffing establishment, and (iv) the average number of cases handled by each social worker (with a breakdown by active and completed case);

(3) whether it will review the operation and staffing establishment of IFSCs and SCSCs on a regular basis, as well as consider allocating additional resources to enhance their manpower in a timely manner; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) given that there are views that the situation of default on maintenance payments has continued to deteriorate in recent years, and single parents who are owed maintenance payments have no channel to lodge complaints, and that the Government, in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on February 22 this year, indicated that it was considering the recommendation of establishing a dedicated unit to assist in the implementation of a maintenance assurance scheme and the enforcement of court orders to recover maintenance in the "Further Study on the Phenomenon of Divorce in Hong Kong", of the progress of the relevant work;

(5) whether it will consider resuming the subvention to NGOs for opening SPCs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it will consider strengthening the support for carers of single-parent children, such as giving priority consideration to single-parent families for the provision of after-school care services, and providing full-time carers of single-parent families with cash assistance or allowances, etc. which can maintain their living; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) According to the "2021 Population Census – Thematic Report: Single Parents" by the Census and Statistics Department, the number of single parents and the number of dependent children of single parents in Hong Kong are 72 279 and 94 508 respectively in 2021.

(2) In the past five years, the number of cases involving single parent families handled by the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) operated by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) or subvented non-governmental organisations (NGO) is tabulated below:

Year	Total number of cases involving single parents	Number of new and re-activated cases involving single parents
2018/19	11 305	4 848
2019/20	10 462	4 262
2020/21	10 703	4 470
2021/22	10 440	4 247
2022/23	10 082	4 173

The IFSCs do not maintain the average case-handling time for cases involving single parents seeking assistance.

The IFSCs arrange their manpower according to the district's service needs, caseload and complexity of the cases. The notional staffing establishment of the IFSCs for the purpose of calculating recurrent subvention is at Annex. The IFSCs do not have the average number of cases handled by each social worker.

In addition, starting from 2019, the SWD has subvented NGOs to operate five Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres (SCSCs) to provide one-stop specialised services for separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children, including co-parenting counselling and parenting co-ordination service, parenting groups or programmes, children contact service, etc, to assist the separated/divorced parents in carrying out parental responsibilities under the "child-focused" principle, strengthening parent-child connection and providing support to children affected by parental separation/divorce and family change to promote their healthy development physically and mentally. The staffing establishment of each SCSC consists of seven registered social workers (including one centre supervisor). Under the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System, NGOs can flexibly deploy resources and arrange suitable staffing. When providing services to assist divorced parents in jointly fulfilling their parental responsibilities, the SCSCs do not enquire service users about their specific divorce status, i.e. being separated, in the process of divorce, or has completed the divorce, and therefore do not maintain the breakdown of the number of cases involving single parents (and those who have completed the divorce) seeking assistance and the average number of cases handled by each social worker of the SCSCs.

(3) and (5) The SWD has studied different modes for delivering family services. After reviewing and consolidating the views of various parties, it is considered that the current IFSC mode with the introduction of community-based concept should be able to use resources more effectively and provide more comprehensive and convenient support services for families in need. To meet the needs of single parent families, the IFSCs organise groups and programmes specially designed for them, such as mutual help groups and talks. Social workers of the IFSCs conduct comprehensive assessment on the need of the service users and provide suitable services, including effective parenting and positive coping with life challenges, through early identification and intervention, service integration, and partnership with other service stakeholders, etc. The IFSCs also provide additional services

for families in need, such as intensive counselling, arrangement of clinical counselling and assistance catering for special needs (e.g. compassionate rehousing, emergency relief fund, etc.).

The SWD has from time to time enhanced social worker manpower for the IFSCs since the adoption of the integrated family service mode in view of the increasingly complicated case nature. From 2004-05 to 2018-19, the Government has provided the IFSCs with the manpower resource for 154 additional social workers. Moreover, to enhance preventive and supportive services for vulnerable children and youth, the Government has provided the IFSCs with additional resources from 2019-20 onwards, for a total of additional 26 frontline social workers and 14 family aide workers.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned SCSCs also provide a variety of services for separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children.

The SWD reviews from time to time the current family service model to ensure the services are kept up to date and that families in need continue to receive appropriate support services. The SWD will also continue to closely monitor the service needs, operation and staff establishment of the IFSCs and the SCSCs, and allocate more resources when necessary.

(4) The Government is committed to enhancing the effectiveness of the system of collecting maintenance payments and enforcing maintenance orders. Over the years, a series of improvement measures has been implemented to facilitate divorcees recovering maintenance payments. Publicity and education programmes are also in place to enhance public understanding of the responsibilities of maintenance payers, rights of maintenance payees and services available to payees when they fail to receive maintenance payments.

Regarding the suggestion on setting up a dedicated department by the Government to handle matters related to maintenance payment, experience of maintenance assurance schemes in other jurisdictions has suggested problems such as long processing time with only few cases handled, management problems and high administrative costs. Moreover, such a maintenance assurance scheme will inevitably need to impose certain restrictive measures, e.g. suspension of passports and driving licenses, on defaulting maintenance payers as the means to recover maintenance arrears. These measures are controversial in nature as there will be concerns about the rights of individuals and privacy, rendering doubts about the feasibility under the laws of Hong Kong.

The Government will continue to keep the system of collection of maintenance payments and enforcement of maintenance orders under review with a view to assisting people in need to recover maintenance payments. In addition, there is a lack of comprehensive data relating to maintenance payments at present. The Government will attempt to gather further information of relevance for analysis.

(6) The SWD subsidises NGOs to provide a variety of child care services for children, to support parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily including increasing aided standalone child care centre places, enhancing the service of Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project,

implementing the Enhanced After School Care Programme (ASCP) and re-engineering Mutual Help Child Care Centres by phases to provide ASCP for pre-primary children, etc. The Government recognises that certain families with welfare needs require extra support in dealing with the mental and financial pressures when taking care of their children. In this connection, in formulating various social welfare policies and services, the Government has been taking the maintenance and strengthening of family functions as the focus of family services, to provide various support services for carers of children and people in need. For example, the IFSCs/Integrated Services Centres provide emotional support to people in need, and make relevant referrals to support services (such as child care services, residential child care services and respite services) in accordance to the welfare needs of individual cases, thereby allowing the carers of children to be temporarily relieved from their caring responsibilities and alleviating their stress. The Government will also continuously improve its development strategies for child care services, adopt a family-based approach for its services, continue to subsidise NGOs to provide a variety of child care services to support the families in caring and nurturing their children, and to provide fee-waiving or fee-reduction subsidies to child care services for families in need to alleviate the financial burdens of grass-roots families.

In addition, the Government plans to launch the one-year School-based After School Care Service Pilot Scheme to provide focused support for underprivileged families, especially single parent families, with a view to allowing primary school students in need to stay after school to receive care and learning support, while enabling parents, who used to be tied up with caring responsibilities for their children during after-school hours, to choose to work and improve their livelihood. The Government will announce the details in due course.

EMSD announces latest sampling results for legionella at fresh water cooling towers

The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) today (June 7) announced that the department tested 93 water samples collected from cooling towers in 57 buildings during its routine inspections in May this year. Three samples were detected to have a total legionella count at or above the upper threshold, which is 1 000 colony-forming units per millilitre. The latest statistics are set out in Annex 1.

The cooling towers in which the three samples were collected are located at Kiu Fai Mansion, 413-421 King's Road, Eastern District; Vita Tower, 29 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Southern District; and Golden Court, 22-52 Electric

Road, Eastern District. The EMSD has issued nuisance notices under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance to the owners of the cooling towers requiring appropriate disinfection work to be done. Disinfection of the cooling towers in these cases has already been completed by the owners. Details of the cases can be found in Annex 2.

The EMSD publishes the latest statistics of the above information on a half-monthly basis on its website

(www.emsd.gov.hk/en/other_regulatory_services/cooling_towers/water_sampling/index.html).

The EMSD reminds the owners of fresh water cooling towers that they have the responsibility to design, operate and maintain cooling towers properly. They should arrange regular inspections, timely maintenance and periodic testing of the water quality in their cooling towers in accordance with the Code of Practice for Fresh Water Cooling Towers issued by the department to prevent the proliferation of legionella.